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**RPI AND BRUNSWICK CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT TAKE ACTION TO COMBAT
CAPITAL REGION'S HIGHEST SMOKING RATE**

**Rick Stoddard, anti-tobacco crusader, to honor both Tobacco-Free Champions
on Kick Butts Day**

ALBANY, N.Y., March 17, 2010 – The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition announced today that Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) is implementing a tobacco-free campus policy, effective July 1, 2010. Along with Brunswick Central School District, which recently adopted the most comprehensive tobacco school policy of any in the county, these new policies will reach an especially susceptible population as Rensselaer County has the highest adult smoking rate in the tri-county area and young adults in New York State currently smoke more than any other age group. Both RPI and Brunswick CSD will be honored on March 24, 2010, "Kick Butts Day", for their exceptional efforts to protect students and the community from the dangers of tobacco use. Rick Stoddard, a nationally known anti-tobacco crusader, will be the featured speaker.

According to the recently released Expanded Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) report (July 2008 – June 2009), 18.7% of adults in Rensselaer County currently smoke, while 17.0% of adults in both Albany and Schenectady counties report being current smokers. Statewide, adults aged 18-34 years smoke at the highest rate (22.3% vs. 16.8% for the entire adult population). Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of premature death in the U.S. More than 570,000 New York residents suffer from a serious smoking caused disease which costs NYS over \$22.4 million per day.

Students and staff at Brunswick CSD do not need statistics to comprehend the cost of tobacco use. Tragically, six students in the middle school have parents who died from lung cancer due to smoking. Rick Stoddard will visit the school on March 24 to meet with these students, then speak to the entire school. Nationally known for his TV and radio public service announcements, Mr. Stoddard will also team up with Brunswick students to create a commercial aimed at educating students and faculty about the dangers of smoking, the manipulative tactics of the tobacco industry and the district's new comprehensive tobacco policy. Community members are invited to attend the presentation at the school from 9:00 – 10:00 am (3999 NY 2, Troy).

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Brunswick CSD recently implemented a comprehensive tobacco-free school policy, which includes prohibiting tobacco use at any activity sponsored by the school district on or off school grounds, within and outside of the U.S. Cessation programs for staff and students and new enforcement strategies were also put into place with the help of the Tobacco Free Healthy Schools program. To strengthen their new policy, students are gathering support to convince the town board to create a tobacco-free park across the street from the school and the district is working with nearby stores to voluntarily create tobacco-free grounds.

“While the district has always made student safety and well-being a high priority, protecting the school community from the devastating consequences of tobacco use is imperative”, said Principal Richard Pogue.

Brunswick CSD is not alone in enacting change for the health of its community. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute is the first college in the county and only the second in the Capital Region to adopt a campus-wide tobacco-free policy. With more than 7,000 students, 450 faculty members, and renown as one of the best colleges in the country, the Institute will impact not only the health of the local community of students and staff, but will influence the norms around tobacco use in the region and beyond. RPI is currently working with the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition on implementation strategies for its tobacco-free campus policy. Smoking will not be allowed on campus grounds as of July 1, 2010.

“We believe that a tobacco-free campus allows the Institute to provide public health policy leadership, support a culture that reflects a genuine respect for all members of our campus community and visitors, be environmentally responsible, and be supportive of our institutional sustainability efforts”, stated Curtis N. Powell, Vice President for Human Resources. “In addition, becoming tobacco-free supports our Healthy Campus Initiative. We hope to set an example that will encourage the Rensselaer community to embrace the spirit of healthy living, learning and working”.

Both RPI and Brunswick CSD will be honored on March 24, “Kick Butts Day”, a national day of activism that empowers youth to speak up and take action against the tobacco industry. The Recognition Dinner to honor youth activists, legislators, business leaders, health professionals and community members will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Troy from 5:30-8:00 pm. Rick Stoddard, author of *The Burning Truth*, will be the featured speaker. After losing wife, Marie, to lung cancer caused by cigarette smoking, Mr. Stoddard has crossed the country to visit more than 2500 schools and has spoken to 1.1 million youth about the hazards of tobacco use.

The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition, Reality Check Youth Action, Center for Smoking Cessation at Seton Health and the Tobacco-Free Healthy Schools Program are all grant funded programs from the NYS Bureau of Tobacco Use Prevention and Control. The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition is a non-profit partnership of people and organizations from Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady counties working to decrease the social acceptability of tobacco use, eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke, promote cessation and prevent the initiation of tobacco use among youth and young adults. For more information on the Coalition and its programs, go to www.SmokeFreeCapital.org.

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